Why not intersectionality?

A concept at work in modern complex societies. Intersectionality and class travels

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Preface

The following paper was presented at the Ph.D.-course: 'Intersectional analysis', January 18.-20. 2006, Aalborg University, Denmark.
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Yvonne Mørck:
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Introduction

> "Once upon a time, I was a 'socially disadvantaged' child. An enchantedly happy child. Mine was a childhood of intense family closeness. And extreme public alienation. Thirty years later I write this book as a middle-class American man. Assimilated… It is education that has altered my life"
>
> (Rodriguez 1983: introduction page).

In this presentation, I want to explore how the concepts of 'intersectionality' and 'class travel' can inspire one another in a study of multicultural issues in contemporary Danish upper secondary schools. I conducted fieldwork in two different kinds of upper secondary schools: an ordinary upper secondary school and an upper secondary school with a business curriculum programme, a so-called 'business senior high school'. Both types of upper secondary school programmes consist of three years of schooling and qualify graduates for admission to higher education. The fieldwork took place in the second year of the three-year secondary school programme and over a 3½-month period. It included observations in five classes, participant observation among students and teachers outside lessons, essays written by the students on the theme of 'the multicultural upper secondary school', photographs of everyday life at the respective schools taken by selected students with disposable cameras, and 65 interviews with students, teachers, student advisers and a headmaster.[1] In both schools, approximately 30 percent of the students were drawn from ethnic minorities, most of whom hailed from a non-Western,

[1] The fieldwork took place in 1999/2000 and 2001, respectively. Five classes: three at the ordinary upper secondary school and two at the business senior high school. Other sources of data are written documents, such as articles in teachers' journals and newspapers, evaluation reports from various upper secondary schools and reports from the Ministry of Education.

Muslim background, including Turkey; however, some had roots in, e.g. the former Yugoslavia, the Philippines, China or South America. Most of these young people had grown up in Denmark, although some had arrived as refugees during childhood.

Danish upper secondary schools have experienced an increased intake in new groups of students from both ethnic majority and ethnic minority backgrounds, particularly during the last decade. New forms of intersections of diversity and social stratification – hitherto unknown in this area of youth education – have therefore been placed on the agenda. The range of diversity among the students in terms of their social class, ethnicity, nationality, mother tongue, religion and lifestyle has increased considerably. Consequently, an unprecedented proportion of the student population is composed of first-generation upper secondary school students, i.e. they are the first members of their families to have come this far in the education system. In other words, these youngsters can be characterized as 'class travellers' – they have taken the first step in what can be regarded as a shorter or longer 'class travel'. A provisional definition of the concept of class travel is to grow up in one type of environment, to move into and live one's life in other environments, while preserving contact to the original milieu, especially their immediate family (Gullestad 2002:73). Class travel thus deals with (social) climbing in the societal hierarchies, whereby one changes class affiliation and social group (Trondman 1994:44).

The concept of intersectionality

In the article "Intersectionality and Diversity: The Fadime-case" (Mørck 2005), I have worked with the concept of *intersectionality*. The aim here was to present an analytical framework capable of contributing to deeper insight pertaining to a range of issues that has become significant in the multicultural Nordic societies. This was achieved using a historiographical approach and an empirical case illustrating how one can work with the perspective of intersectionality, namely the honour killing of the Swedish-Turkish-Kurdish woman Fadime Sahindal in Sweden in 2002. The historiography of the concept of intersectionality described one of the routes leading back to

its feminist roots, *Black Feminism*, and especially the writing of Afro-American scholars and activists.[2] One of the leading figures in black feminist epistemology is the American sociologist Patricia Hill Collins (1989, 1990, 1998). Her strategy of analysis, which she refers to as 'the matrix of domination', was operationalized in a critical manner in the Fadime-case. Thus, the idea was to see what 'the matrix of domination' had to offer analytically; however, standpoint theory – in this case represented by Collins – has essentialist tendencies (e.g. Sudbury 1998:29).[3] Other forms of criticism were put forward, but here I will stress that Collins' approach originates in a specific historical and socio-cultural context. Consequently, she has not included ethnic minority women and their daughters in Europe – including women with Muslim roots – in the category 'black woman'. Such an omission renders it difficult to apply her approach in a contemporary Nordic context. Thus, it is problematic to directly transfer an epistemology from one context to another. In spite of this criticism, however, I concluded that intersectionality offers very useful insights and tools.

A generally accepted *definition of intersectionality* within feminist theory (e.g. Collins 1989, 1990, 1998; Lykke 2003; Mørck 2005) is:

(1) To analyse whether and how different characteristic socio-cultural hierarchies such as class, gender, age, ethnicity, nationality and sexuality intersect. To explore how such categories construct and support one another, thus creating inclusion and exclusion. To examine how these classic social hierarchies intersect with more locally rooted and recognized components. The aim is to be able to simultaneously cope with several systems of domination or inequalities. Furthermore, the purpose is to capture and describe complexities as well as examples of transgressions of the socio-

[2] See de los Reyes & Mulinari (2005) for other non-feminist critical approaches operating with a similar idea but not using the term intersectionality. In my article, I point out that feminist scholars at least since the early 1970s have either explicitly used concepts such as intersectionality, intersect or intersection, used other – but similar – concepts, e.g. simultaneity of oppression, synthesis of class, race, gender and sexuality and interlocking systems of oppression, or have implicitly written about the same phenomenon without using the concept intersectionality (see Mørck 2005 for references and Mørck 1998 for an implicit use of intersectionality). See Lykke 2005 for a similar observation.

[3] Essentialism implies making an ontological determination of categories such as 'woman' and 'black' which are further regarded as representing unique epistemological positions.

cultural taken for granted. Thus, intersectionality implies a de-naturalization of social categories and the approach applies a social constructivist, relational and process-oriented frame of understanding.

(2) It is stressed that both the inclusion and exclusion of axes of components are deliberately carried out while being sensitive towards the context and the empirical data, i.e. analytical sensitivity is important. Simultaneously, it can be strategically important to insist on the analytical and political relevance of the gender category in a world permeated with gender power/patriarchal power.

My point of departure is (1) that the combination of intersectionality and class travel is relevant in relation to a *particular* aspect of my data and to a *specific* aim and (2) that class travellers are always gendered and ethnified. Borrowing a term from the British-Asian sociologist Avtar Brah, I give 'primacy' to the intersection of class, gender and ethnicity while simultaneously being sensitive to the empirical context I am analysing. This implies that I will be able to include or 'prioritise' other axes of components, including locally recognized components in the final analysis (paraphrase of Brah 1996:246). My aim is to gain insight regarding different intersections in order to obtain knowledge regarding the barriers experienced by youth when wrestling with their class travels. Consequently, this knowledge could provide teachers and student counsellors with relevant tools to support the class travellers. Forms of critical thinking other than feminism challenge one-dimensional analyses of power (los Reyes & Mulinari 2005:8). It thus appears productive to broaden the frame of intersectional analyses as well as to generate dialogue between different critical approaches (ibid.7).[4] This is what I attempt to do by introducing the concept of class travel; however, the concept is not

[4] If the concept of intersectionality is solely described and maintained as 'a feminist concept', the knowledge produced by such types of critical thinking are rendered invisible (los Reyes & Mulinari 2005:8). I would categorize Bourdieu as part of a critical thinking that works with intersectionality. Bourdieu describes the intersection of class and gender differences like this: "It is as impossible to separate the characteristics of gender from the quality of class as it is to separate the yellow colour of the lemon from its sourness. A class is defined in its inner nature/essence through the place and the value it ascribes to the two sexes and to the socially constituted dispositions of the sexes. Thus, there are as many ways of realizing femininity as there are classes and subgroups of classes. The gender division of labour in different social classes therefore takes quite different forms, both in the representations which are formed by this division of labour and in practice" (Bourdieu 1979:119-120 in Prieur 1998:132-133, my translation).

particularly developed; it thus requires theoretical strengthening.[5] For this purpose, the work of a well-renowned class traveller, namely Pierre Bourdieu, is useful, including his concepts such as forms of capital, habitus and the contradictions of inheritance (Bourdieu & Waquant 1996; Bourdieu 1999). These and other concepts developed by Bourdieu (e.g. masculine domination) could be productive in combination with approaches and concepts developed by others, e.g. gender regime (Connell 2000), hybridity and creolisation (e.g. Hall 1992; Eriksen 1994). However, as this paper represents a work in progress, it merely presents an exploration of how the concepts of intersectionality and class travel can stimulate one another. It is not possible within the scope of this paper to go further into such combinations and to a present a broader analytical strategy.[6]

Class travels – and other travels

For the concept of class travel, I am inspired by Swedish ethnologists and sociologists[7], the Norwegian anthropologist Marianne Gullestad (2002), as well as various autobiographies by academic scholars who have written about their class travels[8], and authors with ethnic minority backgrounds who have described numerous kinds of travels, including class travels.[9] I am also encouraged by the paper "Ain't I A Woman? Revisiting Intersectionality" by Avtar Brah and Ann Phoenix (2004).[10] They use autobiographies (and empirical studies) "…to demonstrate that social class (and its intersections with gender and 'race' or sexuality) are simultaneously subjective, structural and about

[5] The same can be said about the concept of 'social heritage' ('social arv') which is a very commonly used 'folk term' in Denmark as well as in Danish research. In research, this concept is often connected with the work of Bourdieu (see Ejrnæs, Gabrielsen & Nørrung 2004).

[6] See Mørck 2003 for a more developed example of intersectionality at work in relation to some of my other data from the study.

[7] E.g. Åström 1991; Frykman 1991, 1998; Löfgren 1991; Trondman 1994; Wennerström 2003.

[8] E.g. Klausen 1999; Ambjörnsson 2000; Mahony & Zmroczek 1997.

[9] E.g. Rodriguez 1983; Santiago 1999; hooks 1997; examples from a Danish context: Khader 2000; Rashid 2000. I see the theme of class travel and autobiographies as a much welcome return to an old interest of mine as my 'magister-dissertation' was about the life history method in anthropology (Mørck 1990).

[10] The paper was part of the literature for the Ph.D.-course. Ann Phoenix and Beverly Skeggs were some of the keynote speakers.

social positioning and everyday practices" (Brah & Phoenix 2004:75). Beverley Skeggs' work (1997a, 1997b, 2004a, 2004b) is also very rewarding, including her chapter in the interesting book "Class Matters," which is about female class travels (Mahony & Zmroczek 1997).

Throughout history, human beings have embarked upon different kinds of travels, such as between social groups based for example on class, ethnicity or religion and between geographical places such as the countryside and cities, regions and nations. All such travels involve a number of 'culture meetings'. One meets people with other ways of living and one encounters foreign cultural and language codes, as well as values, norms, experiences and frames of interpretation that contrast with one's own (paraphrase of Gullestad 2002:73). A class travel transforms the class traveller as the 'culture meetings' that (s)he undergoes create new perceptions of the self and syncretistic patterns of culture and behaviour are developed. Socio-cultural differences develop between those who have completed a class travel and those who have not. The non-class travellers can feel abandoned and be condemnatory towards the class traveller. This can be a painful experience for the class traveller, who possibly also feels that (s)he is not fully accepted in the new environment, consequently also feeling uncomfortable there (Gullestad 2002:76; see e.g. Skeggs 1997b; similar to what Bourdieu 1999 describes as 'the contradictions of inheritance'). A class travel then involves dilemmas, ambivalent aspects and pain, as well as pleasure, creativity and advantages.

One can use the concept of class travel as an 'umbrella concept' for various kinds of travels. Gullestad works with the concept of 'gender travel', i.e. the phenomenon that women have abandoned the traditional housewife role and proceeded to the educational field and the labour market. Many Nordic middle-class ethnic majority women have completed such travels since the 1960s – and some working class women have completed both a class and a gender travel (Gullestad 2002:75; Wennerström 2003). Young, contemporary ethnic minority women from environments unfamiliar with the education system who are now pursuing their upper secondary education and higher education are well under way with such travels.

My definition of a gender travel also implies attention towards men as gendered: i.e. perceptions of masculinity and femininity are also at stake when men regardless of ethnic background make a class travel (for ethnic majority men, see e.g. Frykman 1991; Ambjörnsson 2000). According to working class norms, there is a tendency to associate academic interests with the feminine. This implies that young men who are academic achievers and/or who study (especially the arts and social sciences) are seen to be losing their masculinity (Ambjörnsson 2000; Frosh, Phoenix & Pattman 2002).[11] Thus, masculinity and femininity ought to be thought of in plural.

When exploring the class traveller and the class travel process, I work with three dimensions dealing with forms of capital and habitus. [12] The idea is to capture similarities as well as differences between ethnic majority and ethnic minority class travellers, i.e. to explore what it means to be a newcomer to an unknown field, such as an upper secondary school.

I: A class travel can involve a language travel in the sense that the dominating language is different from one's mother tongue (which is the case for ethnic minority youngsters), is a dialect (language related to geographic affiliation – this can involve majority as well as minority youth), is a sociolect (language connected to social or subculture affiliations such as e.g. working class or hip-hop culture respectively – this can involve majority as well as minority youth).[13] There are also different language codes related to age which can

[11] See the film 'Billy Elliot' in relation to artistic work.

[12] Bourdieu describes three forms of capital: the economic (economic resources), the cultural (related to family background, i.e. mastery of social codes and recognized preferences e.g. in relation to common knowledge, education, language and cultural competence, taste and bodily posture) and the social (existing or potential resources which the individual or the group have access and disposal to through a network of contacts and acquaintances which one can use in order to manage in society) A fourth capital is the symbolic which is the total capital of an individual, i.e. a capital that is not seen as symbolic capital but as a legitimate inherited competence (Bourdieu 1995; Bourdieu & Waquant 1996). Habitus is historically constituted. I.e. it is the result of an internalisation of external structures – habitus is socialized subjectivity (Bourdieu 2002:30). In the Danish welfare state it is especially the cultural and the social forms of capital that influence how the individual is doing in the educational system.

[13] Some ethnic minority youth – and also some majority youth that grows up in the same neighbourhood – has developed what is termed 'Paki-Danish'. This is an example of a sociolect that is not recognized in an upper secondary school.

influence the relation between students and teachers (this can involve majority as well as minority youth) (inspired by Becker Jensen 1997). Thus, the traveller might not fulfil the Danish-language qualifications and/or a certain level of technical/professional language. In other words, in order to manage the students have to develop a certain level of qualifications in relation to Danish as well as to a technical/professional language (what Becker Jensen terms professiolect).

II: Secondly, a class travel implies different or partly different ways of thinking, acting and interpreting that the class traveller has to relate to. There can be important variations between the homeland of the family (which is the case for many ethnic minority youth), the home, the region or the neighbourhood (this can in different degrees be the case for majority as well as minority youth) in relation to the ways of thinking, acting and interpreting that are expected in the dominant part of majority society and in educational institutions. The differences deal with e.g. perceptions of education, person, family and gender, as well as with the status of religion.[14] For ethnic minority youth, it can imply tension between the traditionality often represented by the parent generation and the late modern or post-traditionality represented by the majority society.

III: Thirdly, a class travel can mean that the youngster, who has a specific network in relation to the family and for her/him familiar contexts, must develop a network in relation to the educational institution and the labour market in order to get by in these arenas.

Examining the two fields of research – ethnic minority youth in (Western) Europe and the United States and class travellers with ethnic majority backgrounds – there is remarkably similar usage between them. The travel metaphor is prevalent, as both groups must

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[14] The educational arena is secular, i.e. atheistic and/or 'cultural Christian' (Protestantism) norms and values prevail. See Klausen 1999 for an example of a majority student in Norway some decades ago: He came from a very Christian background. His father did not want him to attend upper secondary school because he was afraid that the son would loose his faith. His mother insisted that the son got into education, he became an anthropologist – and his father's fear proved right. See Rodriguez 1983; Santiago 1999 (ethnic minorities in the USA with Catholic background); Rashid 2000; Khader 2000 (ethnic minorities in Denmark with Muslim background).

relate to a range of ‘culture meetings’ while on their travels that will inevitably influence them. Creativity is displayed, and the travellers develop different syncretistic forms and expressions of identifications. Such forms and expressions are reflected in theoretical concepts such as hybridity, creolisation and commuting which signal mobility as well as possible tensions between different arenas. These people are detached from their original roots; they often experience social isolation and homelessness; and they have a feeling of ‘standing outside’, living life in a kind of exile. Both categories pay a price for their travels, namely a feeling of uncertainty and homelessness. However, there are also a number of advantages and pleasures experienced when embarking upon such travels: getting to know several socio-cultural arenas; being creative in relation to identifications and expressions; and serving as potential carriers and representatives of progress and change (Frykman 1989 in Trondman 1994). As such, travels often involve a shift from rural to urban areas, as well as new opportunities in relation to identification, employment and entertainment (see e.g. Frykman 1991; Trondman 1994; Mørck 1998; Gullestad 2002). However, both fields of research lack sensitivity towards the complicated intersections of e.g. class, gender, ethnicity and age. Thus, the concept of intersectionality appears quite useful.

I will now turn to two examples of class travellers.

A class of class travellers

Most of the students in the business senior high school class that is the focus of the following can be described as class travellers: their parental backgrounds range from illiteracy to a single father – with an ethnic minority background – with an academic degree from his country of origin. In many respects, there are significant similarities between majority and minority youth attempting to become class travellers. Both categories must navigate in an educational culture or arena dominated by middle class norms, ideals and values (high culture). A ‘hidden curriculum’ exists i.e. things that are taken for granted in relation to academic work, the social sphere and norms for behaviour, which contributes to setting the varied requirements and expectations that the youngsters are expected to meet. This can

include certain ways of talking and arguing, certain ways of writing a paper and general common knowledge (e.g. knowledge of history, society and high culture). In other words, a certain habitus is expected. This 'hidden curriculum' was founded on specific historically defined criteria and principles, which have primarily been established by white men from the middle and upper classes.

To provide a sense of the context and atmosphere in the class, it is worthy of note that many of the students came late to class; during lessons, students were coming and going; there was a lot of noise and small talk; and some pupils were eating and consuming soft drinks. Although it was forbidden, open mobile phones were within reach on the desks or in pockets so that instant text messages could be checked and answered – either by leaving the class or within the class itself, i.e. during lessons. *"Don't you know that this is a Paki-school?"* one of the minority boys asked me, i.e. there were many ethnic minority students. In the class, 50 percent of the 34 students had roots in ethnic minority groups, including three of mixed descent.

Two student portraits:

Marie: Struggling in the dark

Marie is a female ethnic majority student. Her parents were unskilled workers until they were forced to prematurely withdraw from the labour market due to illness. She has a younger brother whom she describes as a "*problem child*". Marie lives in a Copenhagen neighbourhood that is stigmatised by social problems and a large percentage of ethnic minorities. She has attended primary and secondary school in the same area. Marie is employed in a clothing store. She appears cheerful and talks rapidly. She is pretty and dresses in a nice, trendy style. In class, Marie contributes to the noise and commotion and appears to have difficulty concentrating on her academic work.

Marie cannot receive help from her parents with her school work. She would appreciate more goal-oriented instructions than those that are available in her everyday school life. However, no such instructions are provided at her upper secondary school, e.g. a 'homework café'. Her essay on 'multicultural upper secondary schools', which was part

of my study, reveals that her language skills are rather shaky (e.g. spelling problems). Her essay is also written in characteristically non-academic language and appears unfocused. When interviewed Marie says that: *"Many teachers expect too much of us!"*. Marie thinks that most of the students in her class, herself included, lack what she terms common knowledge. Consequently, she struggles to keep up in many subjects. Marie says:

> "It's difficult to say: 'I lack common knowledge. What shall I do?' [But] you constantly feel that you don't get enough out of the youth education … because … there are so many fundamental things that you don't understand."[15]

A class traveller such as Marie is struggling in the dark. Although she has realised that she lacks common knowledge, she finds it very difficult to figure out how she can improve her cultural capital, how she can navigate in the 'hidden curriculum' and implicit norms and rules characterising upper secondary school. She requests assistance from her teachers, but she does not continue to raise enquiry until she genuinely understands the answers on the grounds that she is afraid it will influence her marks negatively or because the teachers – she feels – send signals that she ought to stop raising questions. As she cannot turn to her parents for academic support, she wrestles alone with her class travel.

Marie has embarked upon both a class travel and a gender travel. She belongs to a generation of ethnic majority women who enjoy significant personal latitude. She is expected to be able to form her own life and be capable of making her own life choices – e.g. how to be a young woman, a student and make educational decisions. It is difficult to discern her parents' hopes and aspirations for her education, including whether they have supported her upper secondary school studies; however, Marie's statements provide the sense that her parents do not have particularly great cultural and social capital. As they have no education and left the labour market at a young age, they

[15] See Skeggs 1997b for a similar point.

probably have little knowledge of the educational system, and their network must be weak in relation to the labour market.

Sami: Old but not productive news

Sami has photographed the class during a lesson in which all of the students are working, *"that doesn't happen that often, so I had to take a picture!"* (Sami in interview).

For Sami, whose parents stem from Turkey, upper secondary school poses a major challenge. He is a good-looking, well-dressed young man with dreams of becoming an actor. He works in a supermarket. His vocabulary does not seem particularly broad and his language skills appear uneven. His is tired of school, is often late for class and his attendance is irregular. As regards his 'economics' class, he says "*I don't understand anything!"*. He has not submitted the last 6-7 papers. He is a troublemaker in class: he often talks loudly and he leaves the classroom without any apparent reason.

His father has seven years of schooling from Turkey and he is employed as an unskilled factory worker. His mother has been an illiterate housewife. She has attended Danish classes and now works as a cleaning lady. This indicates that his parents have little knowledge of the Danish education system and the Danish labour market that could be of any use to Sami. His elder brother has an upper secondary school education; however, his grades were poor and he now works in a 7-11-store. Sami therefore cannot receive academic support from his immediate family.

Sami lives with his parents in a rather stigmatised Copenhagen suburb. He has attended a school in the neighbourhood that had a special 'multicultural program', which he was quite pleased with. In the tenth grade, Sami attended another school with an English program, as he is very good at English. This was a very 'white school'. There, he did not feel comfortable, neither among the students nor in relation to the teachers. His father says to him: *"Educate yourself!"*. Sami's father has told him to get an education so he can avoid working as hard as his father has had to. Sami describes his parents' view on education by saying: *"My parents are pushing*

me to study, because they think it is for my own good. My father knows what the future will bring, because he himself has been young. But he has not been young in this way," i.e. in Denmark in the beginning of the 21st century.[16] Thus, Sami does not talk much with his parents about his life as a young person nor of his school work. Some of his friends have obvious social problems and are involved in crime. Thus, his peer-group does not provide an environment that is supportive for the class travel that Sami is attempting to embark upon.

In the English class, the students had a text about 'multicultural Britain', including racism. Sami is strong in English, so I had expected him to participate in the discussions, but he did not; instead, his contribution was to the noise in class. Later, when I asked why he did not participate in the discussion in relation to multicultural issues, Sami said: *"That's old news! I've had enough of listen to it – I had it in school for 10 years!"* One can interpret his reaction in at least two – somewhat overlapping – ways: he is unable to decode or does not have the cultural capital to (fore)see that he could use this "old news" productively, i.e. use accumulated knowledge to his own academic advantage. But – and this is the second interpretation – the subject itself possibly creates a barrier, as it affects himself and the relationship between the majority and minority students. The minority position that Sami assumes as an ethnic minority student – as well as a student with 'weak' cultural and social forms of capital (low proficiency) – might be reinforced if he participated in a discussion about multicultural issues. He does not want to be 'outed' as a minority. Thus, his strategy is to avoid further stigmatisation.

Sami struggles to decode what is expected of him in school. He does not posses the necessary cultural capital required to get by in this educational arena. Moreover, when it comes to behaviour, Sami has problems in 'reading' the expected way to act as a male upper secondary school student. In addition to all of the talking in class, he has a very coarse form of humour, which can be observed among the minority male students in particular. This implies for instance saying:

[16] In Danish Sami says: "Mine forældre presser mig, selvom de mener, at det er for mit eget bedste" which in English would be 'even though' rather than 'because'. However, it is difficult to say if it is a mistake that Sami says 'selvom'/'even though' in stead of 'fordi'/'because'. As I cannot go further into the implications of the two words, I translate it to 'because'.

"'I hate him!' but in a funny way," as Sami explains. Apparently, he is not aware that this manner of speech – together with other forms of behaviour – is regarded as rather provocative by many teachers; and by some students, too. One can conclude that the intersection of his class background, ethnicity and his way of acting out his masculinity works against him. Sami also experiences difficulty in finding constructive strategies that can lead him through his upper secondary school education. Perhaps he is aware of how provocative the violent language is, how his commotion and general behaviour is perceived by the teachers; maybe not. However, he is of the opinion that the teachers who communicate with him should decode his behaviour – not the other way around. Thus, he does not appear to be working on learning recognised and expected ways of acting as an upper secondary school student (see also Connell 2000:81). Consequently, Sami failed his second year in upper secondary school.

Concluding remarks

I perceive the students as subordinated societal structures and frames produced by the education system. However, they also represent active agents capable of negotiating and manipulating their positions within these settings. The frames contain both limitations and possibilities which the students – depending on their habitus and forms and size of capital and how they administer them – can benefit from. I assume a position that I previously have termed a 'multi-critical position'. Such a position implies that one is critical towards all positions, perspectives, interpretations and forms of behaviour, regardless of who represents them (paraphrase of Mørck 2002). I am therefore placing myself in a position in which I can assume a 'critical solidarity' (Johansen 2002) towards some of the behaviour and strategies that some of the class travellers resort to.

Thomas Ziehe, the German social psychologist who has spent decades analysing and diagnosing the position of young people, especially in relation to education, describes the development of the Western countries in three phases: 1) a traditional consciousness, 2) a contra-traditional consciousness connected to the experience with the undermining of traditional ways of thinking, living and teaching, 3) a

post-traditional consciousness that does not include experiences with the subversion of traditions. This is the present time, which he terms 'post–detraditionalisation', i.e. that the undermining of traditions has become taken for granted. In relation to teaching practices, Ziehe suggests a 'third way', or what he terms 'the good otherness', which implies that the students should learn to develop their capacity to learn and acknowledge differences, e.g. my world/outer world, inner world/social world, my inner world/others' inner world. Thus, the educational institutions ought to be places in which the students relate to other subjects and situations than in the everyday culture outside of these arenas. Upper secondary schools ought to be places that create space for cognitive work situations in which the students develop self-distance while going about their academic work. Thus, it is important to generate rituals and symbols marking the separation between upper secondary school and everyday life. Such tools will support the students to understand the difference and make use of the possibilities of a 'good otherness' that are offered to them (Ziehe 2004; Andersen et al. 2004).[17]

As mentioned in the beginning of the presentation, part of my aim is to provide the teachers and student counsellors with tools and strategies that can help them support all students, but not least class travellers. In my concluding remarks, I will therefore briefly present three strategies that the management and the teachers could initiate:

I: To continuously make clear which common values and rules are expected to prevail at an upper school and to continuously make clear what is required and expected by the position 'upper secondary school student'. Making what is expected of the students more transparent – as well as clarifying their obligations and rights – would be an advantage for all students, but especially for those students who are class travellers regardless of their ethnicity and gender. They would then have a better chance to comprehend the 'hidden curriculum' of this type of youth education.

[17] Ziehe has reflected upon the positive as well as the negative dimensions of late modernity - the ambiguity of the processes that it involves. Inspired by U. Beck and A. Giddens (no references), he talks of 'a first modernisation' and 'a second modernisation' which implies the three stages mentioned (Ziehe 2004).

II: To draw up a joined project of creating an upper secondary school that involves some common goals and rules, such as keeping a clean, comfortable and confident environment where the majority of the students like to come because they feel respected and recognised by one another as well as by the teachers. Part of such a project could be to explore common values and norms as well as the differences between teachers and students, as well as internally among the teachers and the students, respectively. Such discussions should take place in a constructive, democratic and dialogue-oriented spirit.

In upper secondary school it is expected that the students attend school every day and that they work together despite their diversity on different projects which transcend their own person. A common ambition could thus be that the upper secondary school (re)presented what Ziehe termed 'the good otherness' (i.e. contributed with something different than what everyday culture conveys to young people). The Swedish ethnologist Jonas Frykman expresses a similar way of thinking in his argument that one must be engaged in educating every student to become 'something' rather than 'someone' (Frykman 1998:31). In other words: The common idea is to give primacy to professionalism in order to make it a common goal to make the upper secondary school a place where the students learn how to learn.[18] Part of such an objective could be to increase the ambitions of all of the students and to boost the self-confidence of the class travellers. In order to succeed, peace and quiet is crucial, both literally and in the sense of safety: that no one has to feel that she/he must explain and defend their complex identifications.

III: To provide teachers, student advisers and students with knowledge of cultural understanding, including tools for cultural self-understanding and inter-cultural communication. Cultural understanding involves historical, theoretical and practical insight into a range of issues such as culture, ethnicity, gender, religion, forms of identifications, ethnocentrism, and cultural relativism, different kinds of solidarity and identity politics. Naturally, the concepts of

[18] See Bugge & Harder 2002 for similar reflections in relation to contemporary Danish upper secondary schools.

intersectionality and class travel can be included as important contributions in these processes.

I have used the paper at hand to explore how one can work with critical concepts – in this case class travel – in combination with the concept of intersectionality. I hope I have illustrated how one can work on making context-sensitive analysis while using this approach. Finally, I hope that I have provided an example of how one can promote the theoretical development of the concept of intersectionality – by putting it to work.

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